

Report sponsor: Rachel North, Deputy Chief Executive (Communities and Place)
Report author: Sue Li, Empty Homes, Compulsory Purchase and Enforcement Manager

Private Sector Empty Homes Strategy 2021-2026

Purpose

- 1.1 To seek cabinet approval for the adoption of the new Private Sector Empty Homes Strategy.

Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 To agree the adoption of the new Private Sector Empty Homes Strategy 2021-2026.

Reason(s)

- 3.1 Derby's current Empty Homes Strategy requires updating and refreshing. The draft new strategy sets out the Council's position from 2021 onwards. It provides the basis for action to bring empty homes up to a suitable standard and into beneficial use and/or tackle environmental and community issues associated with empty homes.
- 3.2 The strategy has been reviewed and updated to ensure it continues to contribute to the Housing focus within the Council Plan's Theme of a City of Health and Happiness. This underpins the Derby Recovery Plan 2021/22, which forms the Council's strategic response to tackling the impacts of Covid-19 upon the city. This includes:
 - a) The delivery of four key priorities to improve the housing offer for Derby.
 - b) A new action plan, which will aim to respond to the four key priorities, which are:
 - Increase the number of empty homes brought into use
 - Increase the number of empty homes that are used for affordable housing
 - Ensure thermal efficiency is improved in empty homes brought into use
 - Maximise income opportunities including debt recovery and funding opportunities that arise

Supporting information

- 4.1 The proposals in the new Strategy should be considered alongside the Housing Strategy 2020-2029.
<https://www.derby.gov.uk/media/derbycitycouncil/contentassets/documents/strategies/derby-housing-strategy-2020-2029.pdf>

- 4.2 As part of its vision, Derby's new Empty Homes Strategy aims to ensure that empty homes are brought up to standard and into use in order to provide increased access to affordable and market housing; whilst also tackling environmental blight and anti-social behaviour. The Empty Homes Strategy has been developed to ensure we are on track to deliver this vision. The new Strategy focuses on a number of priorities for delivery. These priorities reflect housing needs arising from our local demographics, our need to provide good quality, affordable homes and our priorities to tackle climate change.
- 4.3 The strategy provides the strategic basis upon which properties will be prioritised for enforcement in an effort to remove bias, provide consistency and ensure action takes place where it is most needed.

Public/stakeholder engagement

- 5.1 Council colleagues, partners, Derby residents and the East Midlands Empty Property Forum have been consulted.
- 5.2 Major elements of the consultation included:
- a) Consultation pages of the council web site ('Your City, Your Say');
 - b) Online (with option to complete and submit a hard copy);
 - c) Direct invitation to the East Midlands Empty Property Forum
 - d) Use of other e-media including "In Touch" and iDerby;
 - e) Social media including DCC Twitter and Facebook ;
 - f) Diversity forums through an Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA).

5.3 Outcomes and resultant changes to the policy

Feedback from the consultation included a broad range of comments, which are summarised in Appendix 2.

- The majority of consultees expressed agreement with proposals to bring empty homes into use, bring empty homes into use as affordable housing, help improve the thermal efficiency of empty homes brought into use and to continue debt recovery associated with empty homes.
- 89% said they strongly agreed or agreed with the proposals within the draft Empty Homes Strategy and that they would help bring empty homes into use.
- Some concerns were raised about the conversion of family homes into HMO accommodation. Conversion of houses to HMOs falls within the remit of Development Control and where a licence is required also, Housing Standards. Most of these conversions are funded solely by the owners of these properties but where an application for an Empty Homes Assistance Loan is received the Housing Renewal Review Group will consider the loan application. Where the HMO is felt to be inappropriate, a loan application can be declined.
- There was less support for the use of Empty Dwelling Management Orders, although the Council retains this as an enforcement option.

- 5.4 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been carried out (see Appendix 3). The draft Strategy was considered by a range of officers from the Council and volunteer equality forum members. The assessment identified no specific detrimental impacts will be caused by the Empty Homes Strategy.

Other options

- 6.1 An option is to do nothing and allow the current strategy to expire, without replacement. This will however leave the Council without strategic direction for tackling empty homes and vulnerable to challenge when considering enforcement to bring empty homes into use.

Financial and value for money issues

- 7.1 The Empty Homes Strategy will continue to operate within current budgets. It aims to establish a robust enforced sales procedure so that certain debts held against empty properties can be recovered more expediently, along with all associated administration costs and interest.
- 7.2 Consultation demonstrated strong support for offering financial incentives to improve the thermal efficiency of empty homes brought into use in order to help tackle climate change. The Government's Green Homes Grant scheme has now ceased and so the Empty Home Strategy will start to look at other sources of grant or loan funding to assist with this.

Legal implications

- 8.1 The proposed Empty Homes Strategy will provide the strategic basis for regulatory intervention and enforcement against empty properties, leaving the Council less open to successful challenge about the legitimacy and/or appropriateness of such action.

Climate implications

- 9.1 The Empty Homes Strategy aims to make a positive contribution towards climate change by offering advice and assistance to owners to improve the thermal efficiency of empty homes brought into use. Any empty home purchased by the Council for affordable housing will be brought up to EPC level C, as a minimum.

Other significant implications

10.1 Derby Recovery Plan 2021/22

In order to tackle the impacts of Covid-19, the Recovery Plan aims to increase both market and affordable housing and reduce the risk of homelessness. Bringing empty homes into use will contribute towards this.

This report has been approved by the following people:

Role	Name	Date of sign-off
Legal	Olu Idowu	9 July 2021
Finance	Amanda Fletcher	27 July 2021
Service Director(s)	David Fletcher	28 July 2021
Report sponsor	Rachel North	29 July 2021
Other(s)	Ian Fullagar	19 August 2021

Background papers:		
List of appendices:		
Appendix 1	Draft Empty Homes Strategy 2021-2026	
Appendix 2	Consultation outcomes and responses	
Appendix 3	Equality Impact Assessment	
Appendix 4	Empty Homes Team Action Plan	